



Lardner/Klein Landscape Architects, P.C.

Memorandum

To: File - Simpson Park
From: Cara Smith/Elisabeth Lardner
Date: October 18, 2016
Subject: Notes - Simpson Playground + Passive Lawn Renovation Public Mtg.
10/18/16

Simpson Park Playground + Passive Lawn Renovation Final Concept Discussion

October 18th 2016

Mount Vernon School

7:00 – Welcome and Introductions (Judy)

7:05 – Design Process and Revised Concept (Cara/Elisabeth)

- Review results from September meeting and online survey
- Review concerns regarding fencing, surfacing and play structure proposals
- Options for consideration

7:35 – Discussion (Cara/Elisabeth)

8:55 – Next Steps (Judy)

9:00 – Adjourn

Key Points from Group Discussions

- **Surfacing resolution**
 - RPCA policy requires use of both rubber surfacing and engineered wood fiber; use a light color reflecting rather than absorbing heat; Consider Flexi-pave, if suitable for fall attenuation and viable playground surface
 - Group would like the option of no rubber surfacing in the park at all, but accepted the trade-off with higher maintenance costs for the engineered mulch and agreed to a hybrid
- **Play equipment resolution**
 - Agreement with group to keep as many components of the Parkour climbing structure as possible given footprint restrictions and cost, incorporate a taller slide within the parkour “circuit” (consult manufacturer for design options) or adjacent to it, evaluate reducing the number of swings while maintaining two bucket seats for toddlers
 - Key to a good playground design (according to members of the group) is to encourage children’s movement in a continuous circular flow from equipment piece to piece; complimented the concept on providing that and requested that approach be strengthened
 - Group wanted to keep the merry-go-round
 - Group more keen on the cedar logs after seeing the picture of the one in the slide show and how it would be placed; ok to reduce number of cedar logs in plan
 - If possible, encourage public art ‘ramp’ to become a small slide (with transfer station, ramp not needed)

- Interest in a tube slide; concern raised that tube slides are hard to monitor for safety (challenging fun to climb the top of the tube rather than to remain in tube)
- Group considered a track ride, but did not want the one presented due to its low height; would consider it (but not essential to the agreement) if there is a taller option and available footprint for its placement
- Group considered the option of a basket swing; liked it, if space and budget could allow; later concern raised that key parts on basket swings wear quickly
- Group did not want the tower structure or the spring creatures shared in the presentation
- **Boundary/fencing resolution**
 - Agreement to keep fencing and barriers as shown on Preferred Concept
 - Add several benches or other seating option along the northern edge of the mulch area on the park side of the shrub boundary to do two things: provide a seating area in the shade, under the mature oak, with views into all areas of the park; provide an additional barrier to deter 'goat paths' cutting through the shrub beds; and provide a sitting area near the stroller storage area if a user wanted to leave valuables (or a sleeping baby) in the stroller
- **Site Features**
 - Clash of stroller and bike storage locations - Investigate of separation of stroller and bike parking by moving one or the other to the other side of the walkway (keep strollers parked near new benches)

Group Discussion Notes

Presentation

- Judy Lo provided background on planning process starting with the Citywide Park Improvement Plan leading to hiring L/KLA as consultant; she reviewed the charges for the project and the budget
- Community member asked for a definition of 'passive/ un-programmed' space – group discussed the definition to provide clarification
- Cara reviewed the project schedule since March and mentioned focus group meetings
- Playspace Technical Advisory Team (PTAT) members introduced themselves and explained their role in playground planning with the City
- Presentation slides provided background on site analysis issues – Citywide concern that there is too much chain link fence; issue of too many trees within the passive lawn, interrupting the open space; Current circulation problems with cut-through paths and undefined entrances along Duncan Ave
- Guiding principles for design were reviewed
- Key points from the first two community workshops were presented, explaining how the concept was developed to where it is today
- The preferred concept (most current concept design) was reviewed to clarify current equipment selection, surfacing, and boundaries
- A question came up regarding material selection for the seat walls—Will it be consistent with the material to be used for wall terrace at the dog park? *Need to investigate plans for the dog park.*
- Comment regarding existing shade tree – *need to alert the City arborist of existing oak* within current playground footprint potentially declining since last

- visit in the spring (downed branches over the summer)
- Three topics for discussion introduced: playground surfacing, equipment selection, boundaries/fencing

Playground Surfacing Discussion

- Community concerns with rubber surfacing were raised through emails and survey feedback and community members raised the issue at the workshop
- PTAT members explained that they too were not satisfied with rubber surfacing, but the use of both rubber and engineered wood fiber (EWF) was a compromise
- The issue of the surface retaining heat was raised—Judy assured that light colors would be used
- One PTAT member brought up Flexi-pave; if a viable alternative, it will be considered, but there was speculation that it may not meet fall attenuation/safety requirements
- The following information was provided in the slide presentation
 - The rubber surfacing provides **ADA accessibility**, provides consistent **impact attenuation**, improves **site drainage**, and **reduces maintenance**.
 - The community expressed interest in using **rubberized surfacing** in the **Citywide Plan** with **244 completed surveys** collected in that effort.
 - This plan **splits the surfacing** material into areas with **rubber surfacing** and areas with **engineered mulch** or shredded hardwood mulch, where applicable.
 - The **City's health department** has conducted extensive **research** on rubber materials here: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploaded/Files/recreation/info/AlexandriaHealthDepartmentCrumbRubberReview16Sep2015PRC.pdf>
 - The rubber surface is **cleaned by pressure washing** and can be further washed using **biodegradable or organic solvents**, as recommended by the manufacturer.
 - The poured in place rubber surface will contain a **subsurface drainage** system to quickly drain water and **reduce standing water**.
 - As with many finishes and surfaces, during hot weather the surfaces may get warm however the rubber surfacing **does not typically exceed the temperature of a tennis court**. Adults are advised to **use caution** and to check surfaces **before allowing** children in the playground or on equipment. **Lighter colors** will be used at Simpson.

Playground Equipment Discussion

- Large pieces of equipment are not viable under the existing shade trees because they would damage tree roots; it was suggested that this area could be considered for future incorporation of flexible play objects as a Mobile Art Lab project with the community; playground alternatives are slated for the engineered wood fiber area (where the parkour course is currently shown), and possible reconfiguration of the children's garden footprint will be considered to accommodate play components
- PTAT members supported the use of the play equipment options presented
- There was a strong push for keeping the existing parkour climbing structure intact, as it is a unique component that would draw both locals and 'outsiders' to the park; it offers a multitude of climbing options and creative movement approaches (as opposed to the traditional swing or slide that are used for one

- action)
- Swings – the option of including a basket swing came up when reevaluation of the existing swing composition was discussed; some felt that the swings should be removed altogether; others felt that the swing set could be reduced; consensus held that at least one swing needs to be accessible
- An alternative playground equipment option included reducing the parkour to incorporate a tower structure with slide or track ride; if the track ride is available to an older age range, then this might be a viable component to add to the half-parkour feature
- Slides – three options were shown—a toddler slide, a hill slide, and a taller 5-12 age range slide; it was agreed that a slide should be incorporated—preferably a taller slide—and it should be part of the parkour ‘circuit’; a toddler slide should also be considered, if the public art feature cannot accommodate a slide (in lieu of the ramp); feasibility of a tunnel slide should be reviewed, as well
- The tower with slide and monkey bars option was not favored; springers were not well received
- There was some interest in incorporating the somersaults as part of the parkour loop, but not the overhead ladder
- The willow tunnel component was well received
- Desire to keep the merry-go-round

Playground Boundaries Discussion

- Review of the current concept design clarified boundaries that may not have been understood previously
- It was reiterated that a gate will be located at the entrance plaza (artist design and fabrication)
- The issue of dogs entering the playground was discussed; per the City’s regulations, dogs are not allowed in the playground area; signage will be needed direct dog owners toward the dog park; while some do not want dogs in the playground, there is also a desire to have the flexibility of using the passive lawn area with the dog while children play in the playground
- Community members agreed that the playground should not be completely bounded by a fence
- Approaching boundary resolution from the perspective of ease of supervision, it was suggested that a seating area for parents to observe kids be located at the northern, shaded edge of the playground. This could be accomplished using picnic tables, benches, or seat walls—however least damaging to existing tree roots.

Public Art

- L/KLA and PTAT members explained the current design for the climbable sculpture, as well as the intention for the artist to design the main entrance gate; public art concept model can be viewed via the September workshop “[Presentation](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/090816%20SimpsonRevConceptPPT.pdf)” link on the project webpage:
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/090816%20SimpsonRevConceptPPT.pdf>
- Community members are interested in seeing murals or other art projects engaging the community, such as murals or opportunities to display artwork created by kids

Next Steps

- L/KLA will consult play equipment manufacturers to investigate options for incorporating a slide in the parkour 'circuit; final selection of play equipment will be determined by budget and space limitations—slide and swing options will be evaluated
- The final concept will be posted to the project web site at the end of October
- Construction Documents will be produced October – December
- Project construction slated for Spring/Summer 2017 (the park will be closed at that time)